

MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM



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****ADVISORY – Important Information****

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TO: All HAN Recipients

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SUBJECT: Maine CDC/DHHS Advises Caution in Heat

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Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC)

Maine CDC/DHHS Advises Caution in Heat: Keep Cool, Drink Fluids, and Lie Low

GENERAL INFORMATION

Parts of Maine will experience unusually hot weather over the next two days. High heat and humidity will affect the southern half of the state, and the National Weather Service has issued a Heat Advisory for these areas for Wednesday. The hot weather will extend into Thursday, with warm overnight temperatures on Wednesday night. Extreme heat can be dangerous, and the Maine CDC is advising Mainers, healthcare providers, and public health professionals to take precautions to prevent heat illness.

Why should we be concerned about heat in Maine?

Heat is a serious health threat. Over the past 30 years in the U.S., more people have died from heat than from all other weather events combined. Prolonged hot weather can be especially deadly; more than 700 people died in a heat wave in Chicago in 1995.

Studies have shown that people who live in northern climates like Maine's are more susceptible to heat than people in southern climates, and are affected at lower temperatures. This is likely because people in northern climates are less adapted to heat, and do not have good access to air conditioned spaces.

The Maine CDC has found evidence of heat-related health effects in Maine. Rates of hospitalizations and Emergency Department (ED) visits for all causes – as well as for heart attack, cardiovascular diseases, kidney diseases, and diabetes – were significantly higher during the hottest days of the last decade than during the cooler days. And during heat waves in 2010 and 2011, Maine CDC saw notable increases in ED visits for heat illnesses using a near-real-time syndromic surveillance system.

CHECK ON VULNERABLE GROUPS

Some groups of people, like those listed below, are more likely to experience illness from heat and should take extra precautions to keep cool. If you are a caregiver for these groups, check on them frequently, make sure they have access to air conditioning, and watch for signs of serious illness. In general, encourage them to drink more fluids. If you are a health care provider, be prepared to advise patients who have fluid restrictions on appropriate fluid intake.

- Older adults (age 65 and older)
- Infants and young children
- People with a mental illness or who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- People who work outside
- Pregnant women
- People with mobility restrictions
- People with a chronic disease, such as heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes, obesity, or high blood pressure
- People taking certain medications, such as anti-cholinergics, anti-psychotics, anti-depressants, or diuretics
- People living in poverty and who are homeless

More information on these groups is available at Maine CDC's Heat Illness page:

<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/heat/index.shtml>.

PREVENTING HEAT ILLNESS: INDIVIDUALS

Use Air Conditioning and Cool Water

- Use air conditioning to cool down or go someplace with air-conditioning such as a store, library, restaurant, or cooling center.

- If you don't have air conditioning in your home, close windows, blinds, or curtains on the sunny side of your house, and open them on the shady side.
- Use an electric fan to cool off. However, be aware that fans will not help as much to cool you off once the indoor temperature reaches the mid-90s.
- Use cool water - take a cool shower or bath.
- Wear loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing.
- Stay out of the sun as much as possible.
- Never leave anyone, especially children, pets, or those with special needs in a parked car - even briefly. Temperatures in the car can become dangerous within a few minutes.

Drink Fluids

- Drink more fluids regardless of your activity level.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and sugary drinks, since these can cause you to become dehydrated.
- If you are on fluid restrictions or take diuretics, ask your doctor how much you should drink.

Lie Low - Rest Frequently

- Take regular breaks from physical activity – at least a few minutes every hour.
- Avoid strenuous activity during the hottest part of the day (between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.).

If you work outside:

People who work outside or in other hot environments are more likely to become ill from heat. Workers need to be aware of the symptoms of heat-related illness and take preventive steps, including:

- Have lots of water available and drink one cup every 15-20 minutes. Do not wait until you are thirsty. A sports drink can replace the salt and minerals you lose by sweating. If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.
- Take frequent rest and water breaks in shady or air-conditioned areas.
- Increase rest time between work activities if heavy job tasks cannot be avoided.

If you must exercise outside:

- Limit outdoor activity to the morning and evening, unless air quality advisories are in effect and suggest further limiting activities during these hours. See the Maine Bureau of Air Quality Forecast (<http://www.maine.gov/dep/air/ozone/>) for more information.
- Drink two to four glasses of cool, non-alcoholic fluids each hour. A sports drink can replace the salt and minerals you lose by sweating. If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.
- Rest often in shady areas – at least every hour.
- Protect yourself from the sun. Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses. Put on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher (the most effective products are labeled “broad spectrum” or “UVA/UVB protection”).
- Consider cancelling athletic events, or postponing them to later in the day, if the heat index is above 95 in your area. Most weather reports or websites will list a “feels like” temperature as well as a measured temperature. This “feels like” temperature is equivalent to the heat index.

PREVENTING HEAT ILLNESS: COMMUNITIES

- Evaluate the need to open cooling centers. Work with emergency management or other government agencies, the Red Cross, Area Agencies on Aging, Healthy Maine Partnerships, and others to assess the need for air conditioned places for the public, known as cooling centers. Cooling centers can be

located in local senior centers, adult day service sites, health centers, libraries, churches, or businesses with air conditioning. Register cooling centers with 211.

- Extend the hours of places that provide opportunities to cool off, such as pools and beaches.
- Make sure public events provide sufficient shade, drinks, and other cooling measures.
- Check on elderly people living alone and others who are more vulnerable to heat's effects.
- Use communication channels to provide advice to the public on addressing the heat.

For More Information: See U.S. EPA's Heat Events Guidebook for Communities:

<http://www.epa.gov/heatisland/about/heatguidebook.html>

RECOGNIZING HEAT ILLNESS

Recognize and treat the signs of heat-related illnesses as early as possible to prevent serious illness and death.

Heat stroke is the most dangerous heat illness. Warning signs include hot, dry, red skin, no sweating, rapid pulse, body temperature above 105° F, headache, loss of alertness, confusion, rapid and shallow breathing, and unconsciousness or coma. If you see someone with these signs, call 911 immediately and move the person to a cool or shady place, loosen their clothes, and cool them rapidly with ice, fans, cool water, or wet cloths.

Heat exhaustion is less severe than heat stroke, and usually occurs when people over-exert themselves in high heat and humidity. Symptoms include heavy sweating, fainting, vomiting, cold, pale, and clammy skin, dizziness, headache, nausea and weakness. Move the person to a cool place, have them drink fluids and rest, loosen their clothes, and cool them off with water or wet cloths. Heat exhaustion can quickly lead to heat stroke. If symptoms worsen or do not improve, get medical help.

Other heat-related conditions include: heat cramps, dehydration, sunburn and heat rash. For more information about these go to <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/heat/general/infor.shtml>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Maine CDC Heat Illness Information

<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/heat/index.shtml>

Current Weather Conditions and Forecast

It is important to remember that the weather forecast can change quickly, so please monitor weather reports for the most up-to-date information. For weather forecast information, please contact the National Weather Service's Gray Weather Forecast Office at 207-688-3216 or 207-688-3210 (recorded forecast), or visit their website: <http://www.weather.gov/gray>.

US CDC Extreme Heat Prevention Guide

http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp

US CDC Extreme Heat Media Toolkit

<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/extremeheat/>

National Weather Service Heat Wave Guide

http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/heat_wave.shtml